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2004

Simon Varey, *The Mexican Treasury: The Writings of Dr. Francisco Hernandez*

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Recommended Citation

Palmer, Steven. (2004). Simon Varey, *The Mexican Treasury: The Writings of Dr. Francisco Hernandez*. *Canadian Journal of Latin American and Caribbean Studies*, 29 (57-58), 346.
<https://scholar.uwindsor.ca/historypub/234>

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The *quinceañera* ritual is similarly located within Napolitano's framework of the interplay of tradition and modernity. This ritual, she argues, involves learning about gender identity as linked to reproduction of religious and social integrity, and the assertion of a young woman's individuality and differentiation from the family. Napolitano also draws attention to the heterogeneity of symbolisms attached to the ritual by various participants. This is also linked to her discussion of how "traditional" female gender identities, which emphasize the importance of motherhood, honour, courage, and capacity to endure pain, are negotiated by women through their participation in social and religious movements. She explores the multiplicities of gendered self-perceptions that often contradict dominant representations of their gender identities.

Napolitano's work, with its emphasis on multiplicity of interpretations, identities, and practices, enriches our understanding of modernities and contributes to the growing literature on multiplicities and flexibility of identities in such areas as diaspora studies and other fields.

Simon Varey, editor

The Mexican Treasury: The Writings of Dr. Francisco Hernández

Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2001, xix + 281, index, illustrations

Simon Varey, Rafael Chabrán, and Dora B. Weiner, editors

Searching for the Secrets of Nature: The Life and Works of Dr. Francisco Hernández

Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2001, xvi + 229, index, illustrations

Steven Palmer, University of Windsor

The conquest of American societies by the Spanish was followed by a great wave of pioneering ethnographic work that sought to capture for European high culture the knowledge and customs of the colonized peoples. Among the most important was that of Francisco Hernández, royal physician to Philip II, who in 1570 was appointed to undertake the first scientific expedition to the Americas. Hernández was charged with studying all facets of the natural history of the newly conquered territories. Already in the throes of translating Pliny's *Natural History* into Spanish, Hernández was an ideal Renaissance man for the task. He spent six years in New Spain (1571–77) documenting the natural world and the manner in which it had been understood and incorporated by a number of Mesoamerican cultures. Most fa-

mously, he studied the botanical knowledge of indigenous Mexican societies and their healers, and his cataloguing of that herbal bounty in a series of manuscripts, though never published in a manner he endorsed, served as the basis for a number of learned volumes on New World plants that became essential reference points in the evolution of the natural sciences through the nineteenth century.

This dual edition was initially sponsored by UCLA's Committee for the Quincentenary. The original project to produce an English edition of Hernández's writings comes to fruition as *The Mexican Treasury*. Colloquiums and lecture series to commemorate the quincentenary and focusing on Hernández's legacy generated papers that are collected in *Searching for the Secrets of Nature*. The volumes document an intriguing textual archaeology that has complicated readers' access to the work of Hernández, and they are graced by some first-rate historical research and translation. The writings of Hernández presented in *The Mexican Treasury* are historical documents of enormous importance, and a modern edition of them is certainly welcome. A combined reading of the introductory essays in the volume, and of the papers in *Searching for the Secrets of Nature*, is a good introduction to the life and works of Hernández, and also to the problems and debates that have propelled Hernández scholarship and bibliography ever since his very return to a Spanish court much altered from the one that had commissioned his work, a court that now blocked his efforts to see his work into print. Guenter Risse's spectacular reconstruction of the hospital milieu of late-sixteenth-century Mexico in which Hernández observed Mexican medical knowledge and practice and conducted his own experiments is the jewel of *Searching*. He reveals an elaborate hospital network that relied heavily on the incorporation of indigenous and hybrid healing practices, and the essay will be especially welcome by those like myself who were disappointed that the Spanish American hospital was all but left out of his brilliant social history of the hospital since antiquity, *Mending Bodies, Saving Souls* (2000).

Despite many laudable qualities, the value of the two volumes taken together, and each volume taken separately, is diminished by a certain repetitiousness. For example, virtually every essay in *Searching* reiterates Hernández's basic biographical information and royal commission. The books also display an excess of antiquarian detail and contextual fill. The baroque delineation of the many Hernández works that do not actually exist is worthy of Borges, while the elaborate speculation on the formative period of a life that left no documentary trail is stretched to the point of parody. It is also hard to see why Stanford deemed it necessary to publish the books in large-format edition, suggesting a pictorial splendour that the edition does not deliver. Though the surviving 60 Hernández sketches of New World flora and

fauna are usefully reproduced in *The Mexican Treasury*, and a number of paintings and prints intended to evoke the later influence of Hernández decorate *The Secrets of Nature*, the quality of the reproductions is poor and they are very small. Each volume has an index, and they are helpful, but considering the enormous emphasis placed on bibliographical provenance, it is unfortunate and odd that neither volume has a bibliography.

Most of all, though, based on the information presented by the editors and other learned contributors, I cannot help but feel that a great opportunity was missed to present finally a coherent scholarly edition of *The Natural History of New Spain*, the great work that Hernández planned, drafted, and amended, but never saw published—and which subsequently appeared in print only in partial, confused, and rewritten fashion over the subsequent two centuries. If we are to believe Chabrán and Varey's introduction to the problem of the Hernández texts, and Jesús Bustamante's admirable summary of the mystery and history of the manuscripts that were to be the basis of *The Natural History*, what was intended to be the great work does essentially exist in manuscript form, and an intelligently edited and abridged scholarly edition of it would have been possible. Rather than issues of manuscript ownership, time and labour commitments, or academic fashion preventing them from embarking on such a project, the editors maintain that it was their choice to present a broad selection of texts (including Hernández's letters to the King and his will), and then to highlight the importance of Hernández to the Western intellectual tradition by publishing portions of his work—and particularly those based on the Natural History manuscript—that made their way into the work of Spanish scientists and those of the Low Countries and England.

But surely those specialists engaged enough by the puzzle of intellectual transmission and mutilated reincarnation of Hernández's manuscript would be better off reading the editors' version of this and then seeking out the texts themselves for corroboration. Meanwhile the general scholar is frustrated by the piecemeal and once-, twice-, or thrice-removed snippets of Hernández in the work of such authors as Nardo Antonio Recchi, Johannes de Laet, and James Petiver. Given the institutional, financial, and intellectual resources behind this project, a more lasting, notable, and provocative contribution might have been made by reconstituting a critical edition of the Natural History, and gracing it with a pared-down number of the best introductory essays. Amongst other things, this would have seen into print what the editors allege was the conservation of an Aztec poetic taxonomy in the Hernández manuscript—one stripped by later re-presenters of parts of the manuscript in their effort to make sense of Hernández for their own intellectual milieux.